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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000546

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: HOW TO IMPROVE THE NOVEMBER 2006 ELECTION

REF: A) DUSHANBE 0322 B) HOAGLAND-HILLMEYER, ET. AL., E-MAIL DTD 03-16-06 C) DUSHANBE 0283

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard E. Hoagland, Ambassador, EXEC, Embassy
Dushanbe.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Although it is getting late in the game, we still have an opportunity, if we begin work now, to influence the Government of Tajikistan to take steps forward toward meeting international standards in the November 2006 presidential election. If we can achieve this modest goal, we will have made incremental progress toward building real democracy in Tajikistan.

¶2. (SBU) Two critical steps could help: 1) high-level Washington messages to key insiders, specifically first-family members who are known to have reformers in their inner circles, and 2) specific "contract-like" agreements with the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) and with the Center for Strategic Research (CSR) Under the President of Tajikistan, the government's influential internal think-tank, to improve specific areas that the OSCE/ODHIR report criticized in the 2005 parliamentary elections. These two steps would be in addition to and compliment the existing election strategy for Tajikistan.

CONSTRAINTS

¶3. (SBU) Tajikistan will not conduct a 2006 presidential election that meets international standards - if we take a maximalist stance, we set ourselves and Tajikistan up for failure. But the Tajik Government can indeed take steps forward with our attentive, timely, and committed help.

¶4. (C) The November election will not fully meet international standards because the powerful and predominant post-Soviet political culture evident throughout the CIS, aided and abetted by Russian intelligence agencies, still condones manipulation of elections by administrative means (which could be called the power of incumbency if it weren't so ham-fisted and blatant), as well as by outright falsification of results, and because no real opposition candidate is likely to come forth in a climate where any credible opposition to the power structure is intimidated, silenced, or bought off.

¶5. (C) A full-court press by neo-Soviet forces in Moscow ensures the status quo by overwhelmingly electing "friends of the Kremlin." Further, Moscow has used its near total domination of the CIS information space for nearly two years to drum-beat the propaganda that democracy equals anarchy, and that the Western goal of democratic elections is really code for "color revolutions that overthrow Moscow's friends, who guarantee stability, in order to install pro-Western puppets who then do nothing to improve the lives of the people."

POSSIBILITIES

WORKING THE INSIDERS

¶6. (SBU) We have already proposed (refs A and B) meetings in Washington in April, during the annual World Bank and IMF meetings, for key insiders who could pass the following message directly to President Rahmonov: the President can afford to conduct elections that come closer to meeting international standards because we acknowledge that he will be re-elected. It is to his advantage to do so because it would help him maintain international credibility and his balance-the-powers, open-door foreign policy, which appears to be his ultimate goal to preserve Tajikistan's sovereignty.

¶7. (C) The two most important insiders are both family members who would get the message to Rahmonov unmediated: Presidential Economic Adviser Matlubhon Davlatov and Orion Bank Chairman Hasan Sadulloev. Also to be included would be Chairman of the State Savings Bank and real, Western-oriented reformer Mahmamin Mahmaminov, and Chairman of the National Bank Murodali Alimardonov, who has credibly promoted banking and finance reform, even though he himself is an insider oligarch.

¶8. (SBU) The optimum time for high-level talks with these insiders would be on the margins of the mid-April World Bank and IMF meetings. If Washington is willing to risk taking this concrete action to promote further steps toward democracy in Tajikistan, we and the Tajik insiders involved need to know by March 31, simply for logistics purposes.

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WORKING THE SYSTEM

¶9. (U) It is not enough to tell the Tajik Government what to do and then sit back and wait; we need to help them do it. Rolling up the sleeves and getting the hands dirty tends to be more effective than soap-boxing and then criticizing.

¶10. (SBU) At the Ambassador's request, the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) in Dushanbe (the only U.S. democracy NGO that has not experienced post-"color revolution" harassment), has been working very closely in recent weeks, on its own time so as not to conflict with USAID contracts, with key members of the CCER and CRS (ref C). Using OSCE/ODHIR's post-parliamentary-election report, they have together identified specific steps that the government could take to correct problems from previous elections. Both the Embassy and IFES have found officials of good will who are eager to achieve a next election that comes closer to meeting international standards. Understanding that U.S. finances will be limited, the Ambassador is already working with IFES-Dushanbe to identify international donors who may be willing to support this concretely achievable project. We will also soon submit a funding request to the Department for this project.

TAKING THE RISK TO PROMOTE DEMOCRACY

¶11. (SBU) Some say that the U.S. Government is expert at rhetoric and process, but falls short when it comes to working in the trenches to achieve real, even if incremental, results. Embassy Dushanbe wants to prove the nay-sayers wrong. We believe that we have identified concrete steps that can improve the November 2006 presidential election without overly annoying the negative forces in the Kremlin. We firmly believe that working the insiders and working the system are the best steps we can take to move Tajikistan toward the U.S. long-term goal of promoting democracy in a post-Soviet out-post like Tajikistan. We request concurrence and support - both funds and political will - for our two-part strategy outlined above. Please advise.
HOAGLAND